



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the New River Health Environmental Assessment

EA OR-128-03-11

I. Introduction

The purpose of this Environmental Assessment (EA) is to analyze alternatives of the New River Health project. The goal of this project is to enhance habitat conditions within the New River Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) by temporarily breaching the river across the foredune to the ocean at a site located on federal lands. The timing and location of a temporary breach has the potential to improve aquatic and coastal dune habitats for listed threatened fish and wildlife species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), including the Oregon coast coho salmon and Western Snowy Plover. Breaching the river to improve these habitats is also meant to aid local ranchers by minimizing excessive out-of-bank winter stream flows and flooding of adjacent pastures.

II. Background

Decision for management actions regarding New River comes from the *New River ACEC Management*, which is tiered to the *Coos Bay District Resource Management Plan* and its *Record of Decision*. These plans are in conformance with the *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl*.

The primary goal of the *New River ACEC Management Plan* is to manage habitat for biodiversity and ecosystem health with special emphasis on sensitive fish, wildlife, and botanical species.

This EA is also in conformance with Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives, which were developed to maintain the ecological health of watersheds and aquatic ecosystems on public lands within the range of Pacific Ocean anadromy. The Environmental Consequences section of the EA describes the consistency of the proposed action with ACS objectives. A narrative describing how the proposed project will influence each of the nine ACS objectives can be found in the New River Health EA file located at the Coos Bay District office.

All Federal agencies are charged with managing projects to enhance the recovery of Federally-listed endangered and threatened species and their habitats (Section 7(a)(1) of the ESA). Implementing the proposed action is expected to benefit numerous threatened and sensitive fish, wildlife, and botanical species of the New River area.

III. Finding of No Significant Impact

A careful review of the EA, which I herein adopt, indicates that there will not be a significant impact on the quality of the human environment from the implementation of the proposed action. I agree with this conclusion and determined that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared. This determination is based on consideration of the following factors:

1. The proposed activities will occur in localized areas along the foredune of New River located on the Coos Bay District. The proposed activities are not national or regional in scope.
2. The proposed activities will not significantly affect public health and safety.
3. The proposed activities will not have a negative impact on unique characteristics of the geographic area. In fact, the proposed action will benefit unique habitats within the ACEC by improving estuarine and coastal dune areas along New River.
4. The possible effects of the proposed activities on the quality of the human environment are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risk.
5. The proposed project does not establish a precedent for actions with future significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
6. There are no significant cumulative effects identified by this environmental assessment. Although New River will be mechanically breached if necessary, the potential impacts are outweighed by the benefits derived from removing European beachgrass on the coastal dunes for nesting Western Snowy Plover and deepening the river channel to provide better connectivity during the summer for rearing juvenile coho salmon.
7. The proposed activities will not affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in, or eligible for listing in, the National Register of Historic Places. Nor will they cause a loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

8. The proposed projects will fully comply with the ESA of 1973, as amended. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) will review a Biological Assessment of the proposed action through the consultation process provided under Section 7(A)(4) of the ESA. The Biological Opinion developed by the FWS will be available for review upon completion at the Coos Bay District office. Any recommendations made by the FWS will be addressed in the Record of Decision for the project.

Based on analysis by the BLM fisheries biologist, it has been concluded that all alternatives are likely to impact coho salmon to some extent, either directly, indirectly, or cumulatively. The largest risk of an impact occurring from the actions associated with this project would come from the No Action Alternative. Therefore Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 are likely to be the most beneficial options for improving the health of the New River system. Under the Proposed Action, there are no direct mechanisms for an aquatic impact to occur as a result of mechanically breaching New River. However, the indirect mechanisms of impact would be considered "Likely to Adversely Affect" listed fish species and Essential Fish Habitat. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will review the Biological Assessment prepared for the Proposed Action through the consultation process provided under Section 7(A)(4) of the ESA. The Letter of Concurrence (LOC) will be available for review upon completion at the Coos Bay District office. Any recommendations made by the NMFS will be addressed in the Record of Decision for the project. This further supports a Finding of No Significant Impact for the project.

10. There are no irreversible or irretrievable resource commitments identified by this assessment.

11. The proposed activities will not violate Federal, State, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment.

Richard Conrad _____ Date: *July 31, 2003* _____
 Richard Conrad
 Myrtlewood Field Manager